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ABSTRACT

Findings of this November 1980 study indicated that outdoor education staff and classroom teachers should consider not only what they perceive to be important, but also, what children and parents consider important as outcomes and activities for resident outdoor education (ROE). An opinionnaire, designed to test whether participant groups in ROE programs attached different levels of importance to an objective or activity, was administered to 329 children, 168 parents, 27 classroom teachers and 41 ROE teachers prior to participation in 4 ROE programs in Illinois and Wisconsin. The opinionnaire asked subjects to rate four broad categories of objectives (increasing social skills, building on school subjects, improving self-concept, and developing an interest and understanding of the natural world and man's place in it) and rank corresponding activities. Results indicated that building interest in the environment was considered the most important objective area and the second most important activity category. All respondent groups rated building on school subjects as the least important objective and activity area. Agreement did not exist between ROE participant groups as to relative importance of all objectives or activities. Teachers and ROE staff tended to give greater importance to self-concept and social areas than did children and parents. (NEC)

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OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES OF RESIDENT OUTDOOR EDUCATION:
THEIR IMPORTANCE AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

TAFT CAMPUS OCCASIONAL PAPER XXXVI

THE IMPORTANCE OF RESIDENT OUTDOOR EDUCATION OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES AS PERCEIVED BY THE PARTICIPANTS

(A Research Report)

Compiled by: Malcolm Swan

This research was compiled by the students in the CIOE 503 class the Fall of 1980. Students involved were Jeff Cragg, Jane Klep, Deb Willis, Paula Propst, Karen Heinsohn, Jan Pilarizyk, Ron Elwardt, and David Wager.

INTRODUCTION

This study deals with the objectives of Resident Outdoor Education (ROE) and the importance attached to these objectives by participants. It was felt that such a study would help to make resident outdoor education programs better meet the perceived needs of the participants: children, parents, teachers, and ROE staff.

Hypotheses of primary importance were:

1. There is no difference in the importance that different ROE participant groups attach to an objective or activity category as compared to another objective or activity category.

2. There is no difference in the importance attached to individual ROE objectives or activities categories by specific participant groups as compared to other participant groups.

A variety of secondary hypotheses was set forth pertaining to relationships or correlations between objective and activity categories and biographical factors.

This study was conducted during November of 1980 by students[1] in CIOE 503, Introduction to Research in Outdoor Education at Northern Illinois University. These students developed and used an opinionnaire and made a computer based analysis of the responses. Five hundred sixty-one children, parents, teachers and outdoor education staff participated.

FOUNDATIONAL LITERATURE

Expectations or objectives for ROE are examined in several studies. Experts in outdoor education provided data for two studies in which a Delphi technique was used to determine the objectives of outdoor education. Nadeau studied the perceptions of outdoor leaders concerning the outdoor education program in order to develop curricula; and Hammerman used the major objectives of environmental education to serve as a framework for curriculum development, program refinement, and program evaluation.

In his study, Fitzpatrick attempted to examine philosophy and use it to create goals and provide direction for ROE programs. He found these goals to be "highly significant.":

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[1] Jeff Cragg, Jane Klep, Deb Willis, Paula Propst, Karen Heinsohn, Jan Pilarizyk, Ron Elwardt, and David Wager.

1. To help realize the full potential of the individual toward optimum development of the mind, body and spirit.

2. To utilize fully resources beyond the classroom as a means of curriculum enrichment.

3. To develop attitudes for wise use of leisure time.

4. To develop awareness and understanding of man's relation to the natural environment.

5. To promote human relations through group living.

6. To promote civic- mindedness by using the world as a resource.

7. To produce an atmosphere for aesthetic development.

Specific program expectations are examined by Pepper in his study on school camping. He wanted to (1) point out contributions that school camping can make to the whole child; (2) present objectives; (3) present existing programs; and (4) show a potential relationship between camp and the school curriculum.

Studying the expectations and goals of those involved in some aspect of an ROE program, particularly the development area, was a concern of both Fleming and Broda. Fleming examined the relationship between the intents and the outcomes of the ROE experience, and sought relationship between the teacher's intent prior to the outdoor experience and the teacher's and student's reported outcomes after the experience. His study indicates that a high degree of student input before the experience is necessary for this to occur. Further implications show that the experience schedule should not be totally planned ahead and should be flexible enough to meet the needs as perceived by the participants during their time in residence.

Broda studied the selection criteria used in developing ROE curricula for middle grade students, and examined the selection criteria used in choosing individual learning outcomes, as opposed to Fleming's examination of the outcomes of the system. Selection of criteria based upon the organization of society and knowledge was studied, as well as learner centered selection criteria used by teachers. He wanted to know if the criteria used by teachers are similar to those needs of middle school students that outdoor educators feel are best met at camp.

It was the view of the researchers that knowledge of the criteria that people use in developing ROE curricula can aid program leaders in predicting the types of learning outcomes that might be achieved. The curriculum of a program can reflect the

expectations of those members involved in the development of the curricula, such as outdoor education staff and teachers. Parents choice of particular programs for their children indicate their expectations and wishes for the program. Situations that allow students to make a choice within a program reflect their preferences.

It was the belief of the researchers that components such as these should be considered in developing ROE programs and curricula, and that such curricula should be consistent with the goals of all the individuals involved, especially the students.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study were children, parents, teachers and ROE staff involved in ROE programs in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin:

Atwood Environmental Education Center, Rockford, IL
White Pines Ranch, Oregon, IL
Lake Geneva Campus of George Williams College, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin
Lorado Taft Field Campus of Northern Illinois University, Oregon, IL

Some members of the research team also served as classroom teachers for some of the children. Other children were selected on the basis of their imminent participation in one of the above ROE programs. Research team members were also involved in some of the ROE programs. Usable responses were obtained from:

329 Children
168 Parents
27 Classroom teachers
41 ROE teachers

THE OPINIONNAIRE

Construction

After reviewing the pertinent literature, four broad categories of ROE objectives were selected:

(a) Increasing social skills (ISS)
(b) Building on school subjects (BSS)
(c) Improving self concept (ISC)
(d) Developing an interest and understanding of the natural world and man's place in it (BIUN)

In addition, sample activities corresponding to the above objectives and usually associated with ROE were selected and categorized thusly:

(a) social activities (SOCL)
(b) school subjects activities (SUBJ)
(c) self concept activities (SELFC)
(d) environmental activities (ENVIR)

An opinionnaire dealing with these four objectives and corresponding activities areas was developed. It contains three parts:

(a) Part I calls for the respondent to rate each of the four objectives areas on a four-point continuum from "not important" to "very important."

(b) Part II consists of eight sections, each with four activities, one corresponding to each of the four objectives in Part I. Participants rank ordered each set on a "1" (most important to "4" (least important) scale.

(c) Part III elicits biographical data which could be correlated to choices or responses in other parts of the opinionnaire.

Administration and Scoring

The opinionnaire was administered to the children by the classroom teachers or by a member of the research team prior to participation in a ROE experience. The parent opinionnaires were sent home with the children and were returned to the school with the parental permission and health cards. The teacher and ROE staff opinionnaires were administered by members of the research team.

In scoring Part I, the designation "very important" was assigned a "1" rating. The "least important" designation was assigned a score of "4". For purposes of the chi-square analysis, objectives given a rating of "1" were treated as "very important" and those given the rating of "2", "3" or "4" were combined into a group designated as "less important."

In Part II, statements were scored on the basis of the rank (1, 2, 3, or 4) given by the participants. The importance that a participant placed on "social skills activities", for instance, was found by adding up the raw score from all eight of the social skills statements. Had the person selected the social skills activity as the "top rated" item in each case, the total score would have been "8". Had it been the lowest choice each time, the score would have been "32".

The Part III responses were obtained for use in making comparisons with the variables in Part I and Part II.

The responses were coded, keypunched on cards, and verified, by members of the team.

SPSS was used in making analyses. A test of t was used to test for differences in the mean scores by respondent category, and Chi-square was used to learn of any relationships between variables. Hypotheses such as these were tested at the .001 level of significance:

1. There is no difference in the importance that different ROE participant groups attach to an objective or activity category as compared to another objective or activity category.

2. There is no difference in the importance attached to individual ROE objectives or activities categories by specific participant groups as compared to other participant groups.

WITHIN GROUPS ANALYSIS

Table I contains mean scores and standard deviations by respondent category for the four objectives areas.

Recall that the lower scores are associated with ratings of higher or greater importance; hence, the "total group" mean score on "BIUN" of 1.52 indicates a higher rating than the mean of "2.08" on BSS. Notice that BIUN (building interest in environment) was rated higher (.001 level of confidence) by the total group, by children and by parents than the other objective areas. BIUN was rated higher (.001) than "Building on School Subjects" by teachers and OE staff as well.

ISC (improving self concept) and ISS (improving social skills) were rated higher than BBS (building on school subjects) by total group, children and teachers. Improving self concept was rated higher than school subjects by parents as well.

In total, it seems that the respondents perceive building interest in the environment to be most important; and building on school subjects least important in the resident outdoor education program. Self concept and social skills objectives are somewhat in between these two.

There seems to be little in Table I to support the null hypothesis of no difference.

Table II is similar to Table I but contains data for the activities categories: self concept (SELFC), social skills (SOCL), environmental (ENVIR) and school subjects (SUBJ).

TABLE I

A Comparison of Ratings by Various Respondent Category
on Part I - ROE Objectives Opinionnaire

	Total Gp. (N=565)			Children (N=329)			Parents (N=168)			Tchrs. (N=77)			OE Leaders (N=41)		
	Mean	SD	Sig. Over	Mean	SD	Sig. Over	Mean	SD	Sig. Over	Mean	SD	Sig. Over	Mean	SD	Sig. Over
1. BIUN	1.52	.78	2,3,4*	1.7	.86	2,3,4*	1.28	.54	2,3,4*	1.44	.70	4*	1.15	.42	4*
2. ISC	1.80	.97	4*	1.94	1.04	4*	1.68	.88	4*	1.33	.56	4*	1.41	.63	
3. ISS	1.84	.89	4*	1.93	.93	4*	1.86	.86		1.44	.64	4*	1.39	.54	
4. BSS	2.08	1.01		2.13	1.08		2.04	.94		2.19	.79		1.78	.85	

*indicates sig. at .001 level. For instance, BIUN was rated significantly more important than ISC (2), ISS (3) and BSS (4).

TABLE II

A Comparison of Ratings by Various Respondent Category
on Part 2 - ROE Objectives Opinionnaire

	Total Gp. (N=565)			Children (N=329)			Parents (N=168)			Tchrs. (N=27)			OE Staff (N=41)		
	Mean	SD	Sig. Over	Mean	SD	Sig. Over	Mean	SD	Sig. Over	Mean	SD	Sig. Over	Mean	SD	Sig. Over
1. SELFC	17.15	4.78		18.92	4.07	3,4	15.16	4.68	2,3,4	12.78	3.46	2,3,4	13.95	4.83	3,4
2. ENVIR	19.21	4.83		19.36	4.76	4	18.90	4.92	3,4	19.78	4.65	4	18.15	4.99	4
3. SOCL	20.88	5.50		20.21	5.70		22.59	5.06		20.96	4.50	4	19.98	4.49	4
4. SUBJ	22.69	4.26		21.48	3.96		23.33	3.98		26.44	2.66		27.34	3.25	

In the rank ordering of specific activities, all respondent groups ranked the self concept items higher than the others (.001). All groups ranked the environmental activities higher than the school subject activities. The social activities were ranked above the subject activities by parents and OE staff (.001); but not so by parents and children. No significant difference was noted in the frequency at which environmental and social activities were selected. Teachers and OE staff were the more consistent in rankling self-concept activities over the others - much more so than the children and their parents.

Again, this provides little support for the hypothesis of no difference.

BETWEEN GROUPS ANALYSIS

Table III contains the rank order of the objectives and activities areas as provided by each of the four respondent categories. Note the similarity in the rank orders with BIUN being ranked high by all except the teachers. "Building on school subjects" was ranked low by all groups. Self concept activities were ranked highest by the children, parents, classroom teachers and OE staff.

Table IV and Table V contain the between group (respondent categories) analysis on the four objectives areas and the four activities areas.

Notice that teachers (Group C) and OE staff (Group D) gave the social skills objective (ISS) higher ratings than did children (Group A) and parents (Group B). Note also, that parents and OE staff gave higher ratings (.001) to building interest in environment (4) than did children; but that children rated subject activities (7) more important than did parents, teachers and OE staff.

OE staff gave significantly high ratings to objectives and activities "1", "3", "4", and "6" and significantly lower ratings to "7" than did children and a significantly higher rating to "1" than parents.

Teachers give significantly higher ratings to "1", "3", and "6" and significantly lower ratings to "7" than children. They also attach greater importance to social skills, evidently, than parents.

Parents give significantly higher ratings to "4" and "6" than children and to "7" than their teachers and OE staff.

Children give significantly higher ratings to "5" than parents and to the subject activities "7" than all other respondent categories.

TABLE III

Rank Order of Objectives and Activities
by Respondent Categories on ROE Opinionnaire

CHILDREN

Part I Objectives	Part II Activities
BIUN	SELFC
ISS	ENVIR
ISC	SOCL
BSS	SUBJ

PARENTS

Part I Objectives	Part II Activities
BIUM	SELFC
ISC	ENVIR
ISS	SOCL
BSS	SUBJC

TEACHERS

Part I Objectives	Part II Activities
ISC	SELFC
ISC	ENVIR
BIUN	SOCL
BSS	SUBJ

ROE STAFF

Part I Objectives	Part II Activities
BIUN	SELFC
ISS	ENVIR
ISC	SOCL
BSS	SUBJ

TABLE IV

A Comparison of the Relative Importance Attached to Each of the Objectives and Activities Categories by Respondent Groups

	(A) Children			(B) Parents			(C) Teachers			(D) OE Staff		
	Mean	SD	Sig. Over	Mean	SD	Sig. Over	Mean	SD	Sig. Over	Mean	SD	Sig. Over
1. ISS	1.93	.93		1.86	.86		1.33	.56	B,A	1.39	.54	B,A
2. BSS	2.13	1.08		2.04	.94		2.19	.74		1.78	.85	
3. ISC	1.94	1.04		1.68	.88	A	1.44	.64	A	1.41	.63	A
4. BIUN	1.70	.86		1.28	.54	A	1.44	.70		1.46	.42	A
5. SOCL	20.21	5.70	B	22.59	5.06		19.78	4.66		19.98	4.48	
6. SELFC	18.92	4.07		15.16	4.68	A	12.78	3.45	A	13.95	4.48	A
7. SUBJ	21.48	3.96	B,C,D	23.33	3.98	D,C	26.44	2.67		27.34	3.25	
8. ENVIR	19.36	4.76		18.90	4.90		20.96	4.50		18.15	4.98	

TABLE V

Between Groups Comparison of Importance Attached to Objectives and Activities on ROE Objectives Opinionnaire

Children	Variable	Parents
---	ISS	---
---	BSS	---
	ISC	*
	BIUN	*
*	SOCL	
	SELFC	*
*	SUBJ	
---	ENVIR	---

TABLE 8

Children	Variable	Teachers
	ISS	*
---	BSS	---
	ISC	*
---	BIUN	---
---	SOCL	---
	SELFC	*
*	SUBJ	
---	ENVIR	---

TABLE 9

Children	Variable	OE Staff
	ISS	*
---	BSS	---
	ISC	*
	BIUN	*
---	SOCL	---
	SELFC	*
*	SUBJ	
---	ENVIR	---

TABLE 10

Parents	Variable	Teachers
---	ISS	*
---	BSS	---
---	ISC	---
---	BIUN	---
---	SOCL	---
---	SELFC	---
*	SUBJ	
---	ENVIR	---

TABLE 11

Parents	Variable	OE Staff
	ISS	*
---	BSS	---
---	ISC	---
---	BIUN	---
---	SOCL	---
---	SELFC	---
*	SUBJ	
---	ENVIR	---

TABLE 12

Teachers	Variable	OE Staff
---	ISS	---
---	BSS	---
---	ISC	---
---	BIUN	---
---	SOCL	---
---	SELFC	---
---	SUBJ	---
--	ENVIR	---

TABLE 13

NOTE: A "*" denotes that the group placed a significantly greater importance on the item than the other group. "---" denotes no significant difference.

The frequency with which these differences were significant, even at the .001 level of confidence, provides little or nc support for the hypothesis of no difference and indicates that certain categories of participants in ROE programs place greater (or lesser) importance on specific activities or objectives than do other participant categories. There clearly appears to be a difference in the importance that certain groups attach to a specific objective or activities area as compared to other groups.

Table V shows no significant difference between children and parents on variables "1" (ISS), "2" (BSS), "5" (SOCL), and "8" (ENVIR); between children and teachers on "2" (BSS), "4" (BIUN), and "8" (ENVIR); between children and OE staff on "2", "5" (SOCL), and "8".

There was no difference found between parents and teachers on "2", "3" (ISC), "4", "5", "6", and "8"; and between parents and outdoor education staff on "2", "3", "4", "5", "6", and "8". There was no difference between teachers and OE staff on any of the items.

These differences fail to provide support for the null hypothesis leading to its rejection and the further acceptance of the hypothesis that the respondent categories, children, parents, teachers, and OE staff perceive the importance of the ROE objectives differently. Notice that there was no significant difference in the ratings given to "environmental activities" by group, however.

CORRELATION BETWEEN VARIABLES

Chi-square was applied to learn of relationships between the objectives areas (ISS, ISC, BSS, and BIUN) and the activities areas (SOCL, SELFC, ENVIR, and SUBJS), and between a variety of additional variables. This was an attempt to learn if persons who rated one objective high, for instance, tended to rate another objective high - or low - as the case might be.

A large number of positive correlations were identified in the comparison between the objectives. However, these seemed to merely indicate that persons tending to rate one objective high, tended to rate the other objectives high. Because of the "rank-ordering" and the scoring system, perhaps, several negative correlations were observed in the "activities areas."

When the ratings of the objectives were compared to their corresponding activities fewer correlations were evident than one might have expected. A person rating the school subjects (BSS) objective high, for instance, did not necessarily rate the corresponding school subjects (SUBJ) activities above the others. Exceptions to this: ISS (social skills objectives) was related to

SUMMARY & IMPLICATIONS

On the basis of these results it does appear that (a) the participants of ROE attach greater importance to some objectives (building interest in environment, for instance) than they do to other objectives; and that some respondent categories attach greater (or lessor) importance to some specific objectives than do other respondents.

It does appear that:

a. "Building interest and understanding ir the natural environment" is the most important objective area, and the 2nd most important activities category.

b. "Building on school subjects" is the least important objectives area and the least important activities category. This was most consistent throughout the respondent groups.

c. "Self concept" was high as an activity category for most groups. As an objective, however, it ranked below building interest and understanding in the natural environment for most groups.

d. Agreement or congruence does not exist between ROE participant groups - children, parents, teachers and outdoor education staff - as to the relative importance of the objectives or of the activities. Teachers and OE staff tend to give greater importance to self-concept and social areas than do children and parents.

When planning ROE experiences it would seem to be important that all parties know what they wish to accomplish (objectives) and how they will accomplish it (activities).

Outdoor education staff and classroom teachers should consider not only to what they perceive to be important; but also, to what the children and parents consider to be important as outcomes and activities for resident outdoor education. By involving all groups in the planning, the likihood of improved results is increased.

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